

FORT MCKINLEY,
SOUTH FORK TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD BUILDING
On south side of Weymouth Way, approximately
100 feet west of East Side Drive on
Great Diamond Island
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HAER No. ME-59-H

HAER
ME
3-PORT,
27H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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ME
3-PORT,
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**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
FORT MCKINLEY,
SOUTH FORK TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD BUILDING**

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Location:

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East Side Drive on Great Diamond Island
Portland, Cumberland County, Maine

UTM: 19.403980.4836850
Quad: Portland East, ME, 1:24,000

Date of Construction:

1908

Architects & Engineers:

Army Corps of Engineers

Present Owners:

McKinley Partners Limited Partnership

Present Use:

Vacant

Significance:

Fort McKinley attains significance as the largest of Portland Harbor's five military complexes built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fort protected Maine's principal city with one of the most well-defended harbors in the country. The South Fork Telephone Switchboard Building is one of two such buildings constructed at Fort McKinley in the early twentieth century to assist in controlling gun fire from the batteries.

Project Information:

This is one of nine structures at the fort to be documented in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement of 1989 as a mitigative measure prior to partial demolition of the structure.

Christine S. Beard
Tremont Preservation Services
10 Barr Street
Salem, MA 01970

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SOUTH FORK TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD BUILDING
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SITE

Fort McKinley occupies the northern half of Great Diamond Island in Maine's Casco Bay and is a part of the City of Portland. The South Fork Telephone Switchboard Building is located on the South Fork of the island within bounds of Fort McKinley. It is set back slightly from the road in a wooded area on the south side of Weymouth Way, approximately 100' west of East Side Drive.

DESCRIPTION

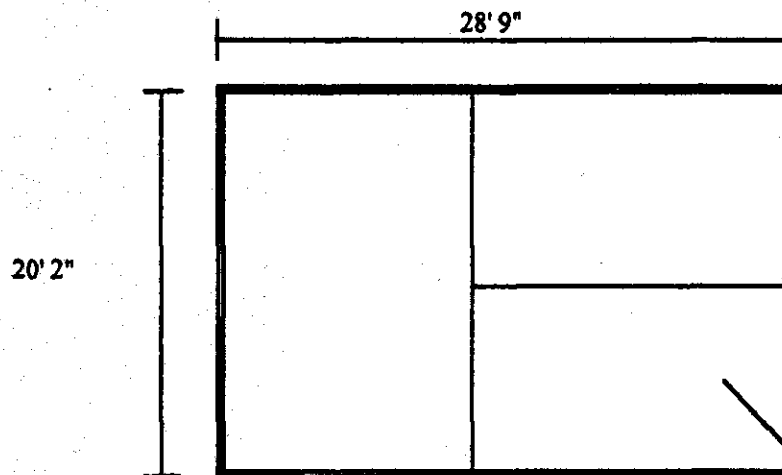
The South Fork Telephone Switchboard Building is in poor condition, with all of the sash missing, roof severely deteriorated, and door missing. Measuring roughly 20' x 29', the structure was built in 1908 using the Sewell method of construction. This technique uses cement plaster over steel mesh on a wood or steel frame. The unpainted exterior took on a cream or light tan color. Resting on a concrete foundation, the building is enclosed by a shallow gable roof finished with tar and gravel. There is one entrance, on the north elevation, but the door is missing. Remaining fenestration consists of one window west of the door, two windows at the west elevation, and one window at both the south and east elevations. There are no sash remaining in the window openings but original plans indicated 6/6 double-hung sash. On the exterior, window openings have no trim. The doorway is framed by flush wood trim. The interior was originally divided into two spaces (a north and a south room) but the north room was subsequently divided into two smaller spaces. Interior finishes consist of rough plaster walls, tongue & groove board ceilings, hardwood floors (north rooms only), simple wood baseboards, and a concrete floor in the south room. On the interior, there is no trim around doors and windows; it is not clear if this was the original finish or if it has been stripped. There are several concrete platforms in the northwest room that were used to hold equipment that no longer remains in the building. There is a wood door with five horizontal panel laying on the floor but it is not known where this originally hung.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Establishment of Fort McKinley was part of a larger effort by the government to provide strategic harbor defenses throughout the country, a practice begun in the late eighteenth century. Fort McKinley was the largest of four new fortifications established to protect the many avenues of entry into Portland Harbor at the turn-of-the-century. It was situated to deter entrance into the harbor from the north, particularly by way of Hussey Sound and Broad Sound. Plans for Fort McKinley included construction of nine gun batteries and facilities to mine the two major channels. In 1905, under President Theodore Roosevelt, a board was appointed to evaluate the country's defenses. The Taft Board, headed by Secretary of War William H. Taft, made recommendations to improve the existing system for controlling the guns and mines. Rather than sighting guns directly, the board proposed to use a sophisticated observation system with optical instruments in the observation stations. Sightings would be sent by telephone into plotting rooms where the data was processed. In turn, ranges and directions were sent to the batteries. In response to these recommendations a number of additional tactical buildings (and additions to tactical buildings) were constructed at Fort McKinley. Among these were two telephone switchboard buildings, one on both the North and South Forks.

During WWII the Navy also established a strong presence in Portland Harbor, sharing responsibility for defense of the area with the Army. The Navy undertook a number of measures to supplement the work of the Army, including rigging submarine nets and sinking old ships between the islands and the mainland to completely enclose the harbor. By doing this, the batteries and mine casemates on the north and east shores of Fort McKinley were rendered superfluous. Consequently, only one battery at Fort McKinley needed to be manned. By 1943, as the threat of a major attack became unlikely, build-up of the coastal defenses greatly diminished and were virtually halted by 1940. Experiences during WWII, such as amphibious landings, air strikes, and the development of nuclear weapons and missiles all contributed to making harbor defenses like Fort McKinley obsolete. In 1950 the Coast Artillery was dissolved, the U.S. Army harbor defense commands were disbanded, and the forts were abandoned.

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SOUTH FORK TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD BUILDING
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South Fork Telephone Switchboard Building
Floor Plan
[not to scale]



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South Fork Telephone Switchboard Building
Original Plan at National Archives (file no. DR 10-79-88)

